

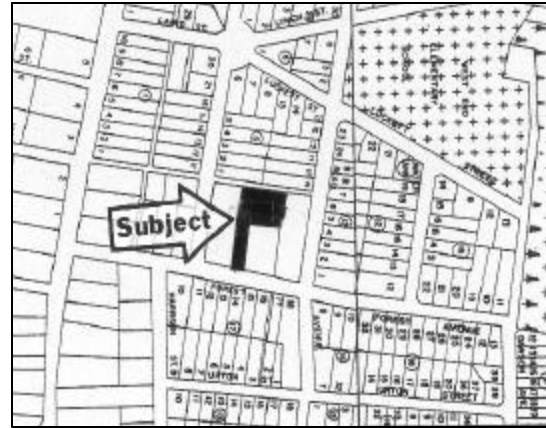
**CITY OF ROCKVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION  
STAFF REPORT**

**September 18, 2001  
MEETING NO. 09-01**

**APPLICATION:** HDC01-0198

**DATE FILED:** August 23, 2001

**APPLICANT/  
OWNER:** Meryar Ebrahimi  
106 Forest Avenue  
Rockville, MD 20850



**PROPERTY DESCRIPTION:**

This house is a non-contributing resource to the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District. It was built in 1992 on a pipestem lot (Lot 22) behind, or west of, 108 Forest Avenue (the Smith House, Lot 21). The Smith House is a contributing resource and is significant for its association with Edwin Smith, an internationally known astronomer and geophysicist. Edwin West, a prominent Rockville builder, built the Smith House in 1890. 106 Forest Avenue is surrounded by houses of historical and architectural significance and represents a modern interpretation of Victorian architecture. The pipestem lot includes a 235-foot driveway with access from Forest Avenue.

**PREVIOUS ACTIONS AT THIS ADDRESS:**

HDC95-0069	Removal of a walnut tree
HD-01-91	Construction of a two-story single-family house

**REQUEST:**

The Applicant requests a Certificate of Approval to cover the existing cedar siding with vinyl siding because the paint is peeling extensively and the applicant has unsuccessfully tried various solutions to the problem. The proposed siding is a 4-inch smooth brushed style in sterling gray with white trim by CertainTeed.



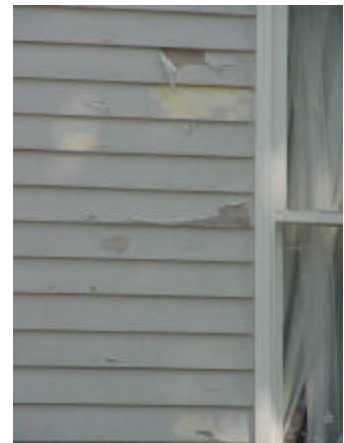
South Façade ▲

106 Forest Avenue



West Façade ▲

View of 106 Forest Ave.  
from the street →



Examples of peeling paint at 106 Forest Avenue

**STAFF COMMENTS/RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Staff recommends approval of HDC01-0198 for new vinyl siding at the house at 106 Forest Avenue based on findings presented below.

***1. Historic, archeological, or architectural value and significance of the site or structure and its relationship to the historic, archeological, or architectural significance of the surrounding area.***

The house at 106 Forest Avenue is a non-contributing resource to the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District. It is not eligible for tax credits and other benefits due to its recent construction and the fact that it does not contribute to the streetscape. Although the house is surrounded by homes of historical and architectural significance, it is situated on a pipestem lot and is not highly visible from the right-of-way.

***2. The relationship of the exterior architectural features of the structure to the remainder of the entire structure and to the surrounding area.***

The gable roofs, porches at the south and east elevations, the balcony on the north elevation and brick chimney form an attractive composition. Original plans for the new house, approved by the HDC in 1991, called for clapboard siding with 5-inch exposure and other details to complement surrounding historic structures which have retained original wood siding material. However, the property is marginally visible from Forest Avenue which is the only historic streetscape. Surrounding historic structures may have a view of the house.

Latitude in choice of materials should be based on the effect on the overall historic district, the streetscape, and the adjacent structures. The Historic District Commission must deliberate on each application individually and is not bound by precedent. What works in one location without adverse effect may not work in another. Preservation of the overall character and sense of a different time in the historic district is the HDC's first consideration.

Other large lots, at 100 and 112 Forest Avenue, were approved for subdivision in the early 1990s to allow further residential development. The subdivided lots front on Anderson and Beall Avenues. The new construction on the lots impact Anderson and Beall Avenues, not Forest Avenue. The new houses built on these subdivided lots were approved for and built with vinyl siding. These houses are located at the edge of the historic district, at 301 and 303 Anderson Avenue and at 314 and 316 Beall Avenue. They remain under review by the HDC as changes could possibly have an impact on the historic resources, the architecturally and historically significant structures at 100 and 112 Forest Avenue.

In contrast, the house that is under construction at 6 Thomas Street is highly visible because it is located on a corner, it fronts onto the premier street in the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District, and it is at the gateway to the district. The HDC approved brick for the West Montgomery Avenue and Thomas Street façades of this new house because of its location, the high visibility of these facades, and the size and prominence of the structure. The house at 106 Forest Avenue is far less noticeable because it is recessed from the street and partially concealed by the house at 108 Forest Avenue.

***3. The general compatibility of exterior design, scale, proportion, arrangement, texture, and materials proposed to be used.***

Vinyl siding is not a recommended material for use on historic properties in Rockville. Although 106 Forest Avenue is not a historic resource, the impact of new construction on surrounding historic resources can either detract or add to the setting of the district. Wood siding was approved by the HDC in 1991 when the original plans for the house at 106 Forest Avenue were introduced.

Staff researched several publications to determine if and when vinyl siding should be allowed for a non-contributing resource in the historic district. According to the "Guidelines for Historic Property Owners, New Construction", new structures should be compatible with the district's setting in setback, massing, scale, materials and details. Exterior features should be consistent with existing original design. This would indicate that vinyl siding generally should be discouraged in historic districts.

According to the HDC's "Guidelines for Historic Property Owners, Siding", synthetic or artificial siding is strongly discouraged for use on historic properties. If original siding is deteriorated, the remaining sound material should be used on the visible façade(s) and synthetic may be used on the remainder. This indicates that it is the visibility of the structure that is most relevant.

According to Owning Property in the Rockville Historic District; A Guide to Permit Procedures, page 19, "Synthetic siding must look and behave like the material it is imitating (wood). Synthetic materials are permitted, not recommended, for new construction and are discouraged for existing structures. Such effects as wood graining should be avoided. Spacing between horizontal lap lines should reproduce that of the original siding."

In summary, Rockville's guidelines strongly discourage the use of synthetic siding for properties in the historic districts but do not prohibit it for non-contributing structures. The location and visibility of the structure in question are probably the most important factors to consider in determining if vinyl siding should be permitted for a non-contributing resource.

*4. To any other factors, including aesthetic factors, which the Commission deems to be pertinent.*

Staff is concerned about the cause of the failed paint layers. If due to moisture build-up in the walls, it may be exacerbated by applying vinyl. Moisture may result in deterioration and rot to the structure.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends that vinyl siding should be allowed for this non-contributing resource partly because greater latitude is given to infill construction with regard to materials, but primarily because of the structure's obscured location. The HDC should discuss with the applicant the advantages and disadvantages of covering the existing siding rather than replacing the siding (i.e. potential for moisture damage) as well as the specific product style.